

Sanctification Pitfalls**1 Thessalonians 4:1—8**

A reoccurring theme in 1 Thessalonians is that of sanctification. Paul's greatest concern after believing was to grow in the Lord. Growing entails learning to walk in a manner that will please Him. As discussed in previous lessons it is absolutely impossible for the old nature (the one we were born with) to do anything pleasing to the Lord. This is why Paul says we should reckon the old sinful nature as being dead (Romans 6:2, 6, 11) and live our lives for the Lord. By treating self as if dead we allow Jesus Christ to take full control of our mind and therefore of our actions. The mind originally formed to the world at birth can now be transformed by His renewing (Romans 12:1—2). The renewing of our minds (Ephesians 4:22—24) is in the present tense indicating it is something that needs to be done continually. We can walk in the power of the flesh (self) or walk in the power of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25). When we absorb ourselves into God's Word and meditate on things pleasing to Him (Philippians 4:8—9) then our mind is being renewed and therefore is being transformed. During the times we allow our minds to be transformed, we have taken off the old nature and all the things associated with it and have put on the new nature (Colossians 3:5—10). We are then in God's perfect will. Every Christian who has ever wondered what God's will for their life is need only to read 1 Thessalonians 4:3 to see that this question is answered in becoming sanctified. This life of sanctification is only possible by allowing God to renew the mind and this is done by considering self (old nature) dead thus giving Him full control.

This process is simple to state but will take a lifetime of hard work to accomplish because the old nature does not want to stay dead. It too often raises its ugly head to take full control doing what pleases the flesh instead of God. This is what Paul speaks of in Romans 7 where we have been given some insight into his struggle with sin. We are never to look back at our sin and our failures but to look to Christ. When you fall, get up and run the race (1 Corinthians 9:24—27; Philippians 3:12—14). Paul always advocated forward movement in a Christians' life, keeping our eyes on eternity (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Pitfalls

The only biblical way to live a life in full sanctification is by living in a state of continually renewing the mind. With this renewal comes transformation and the putting off of the old nature and putting on of the new. To continually walk worthy of the Lord requires a continual renewal. We do this by filling the mind with Scripture and all things true, honorable, right, pure, lovely and good repute (Philippians 4:8).

There is much material published to help the believer get closer to God. There is much to be gained through other's insights about the meaning and application of Scripture. Every book read should drive us right back to Scripture. This is what being a good Berean was all about. As they heard Paul preach and teach they went right back into Scripture to verify the truth of what he was saying (Acts 17:11). This is the model that should be followed by us today to keep us on a proper path. Everything needs to be judged by God's Word (2 Timothy 3:16; Psalm 119:105).

Unfortunately, there are many teachings infiltrating the church that sound godly and spiritual but upon closer examination are actually dangerous. These teaching usually mix a lot of truth with a bit of poison infusing satanic concepts into undiscerning Christians. We must be diligent in our quest to walk in a worthy manner so that we don't embrace these dangerous doctrines as a way of drawing closer to God. Trusted fundamental teachers of the Word have even turned away from sound Bible concepts in an attempt to meet Christ in a deeper way which has influenced thousands of Christians to follow unsound concepts. Some of these concepts are listed below.

Contemplative prayer

The uninformed have probably heard the term and assumed a person is contemplating while praying. Instead, those who teach contemplative prayer encourage the participants to center their thoughts on a specific word, repeating it until the mind is clear of all other thoughts. This mantra prepares the mind to receive messages.

When used in Christian circles, the mantra chosen could be something like God or love and would be repeated with the ultimate goal of suppressing all thought. Once the mind is emptied, God is now able to feel His presence and hear His voice.

Contemplative prayer is completely opposite of what it says it is. Instead of contemplation or meditation the subject is to completely clear the mind and instead of praying, speaking with God, he or she is to wait to be spoken to. This is nothing more than a new-age teaching that has been Christianized. The idea of clearing the mind is never found in Scripture but is prevalent in mystic teaching. These concepts are taught in terms of becoming spiritual and are adapted to be used in the workplace, at home or in the church. Any teaching that substitutes Scripture for feelings is dangerous. This is one of the problems with Sarah young's book *Jesus Calling*. She went out into the Alps Mountains and felt a Presence (she understood as God) wrap round her. She then claims she received messages from God, which eventually became her book. She received these messages by clearing her mind and waiting for God to speak to her.

Praying the labyrinth

The praying labyrinth is designed to facilitate a person's prayer life, meditation and aid in their quest of spiritual transformation and healing. Like contemplative prayer, the labyrinth has its roots strongly tied to the occult and new-age practices and are used as a gateway into the supernatural.

Like contemplative prayer, praying the labyrinth has absolutely no Scriptural support. Trying to feel closer to God and receiving special favors from Him are not possible by embracing this pagan practice. A true Christian will naturally be drawn to God through the study of Scripture. Those who are not saved will try to obtain this through non-biblical means.

Other things to be watchful for are:

Yoga: Much more than just exercise, the philosophy behind yoga is that it is a path to spiritual growth and enlightenment. The word yoga actually means union and refers to the union of God to self, with a pantheistic view of God (God is in all and all is in God). Even if done purely for exercise why would a Christian be associated with things that are understood to be Satanic? As Paul instructs, the believer should not partake of meat if they know it was sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 10:28).

Spiritual formation: While sounding worthwhile the whole idea of spiritual formation is actually quite sinister. Those who follow spiritual formation practices will actually dive headlong into contemplative spirituality and prayer and so-called Christian mysticism. The idea is to find God, not in Scripture but within self and experience a closer relationship with Him by observing certain practices.

There are many other practices that people use to draw them closer to God. They define closeness to God through special experiences or messages given to them. These messages are obtained by clearing the mind and allowing God to give special revelation. It would be impossible to list all the false ideas that are coming into the church but there is an easy way to evaluate is a practice if of Satan or God. Satan always wants to pull people away from Scripture and make them think they are able to have God speak directly to them. Paul tells us to think (Philippians 4:8); know (1 Corinthians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 4:6; Ephesians 3:19; 4:13; Philippians 3:8—10; Colossians 1:9—10; 3:10; 1 Timothy 2:40 to study (2 Timothy 2:15); and to meditate (to think on these things) (1 Timothy 4:15).

There is no shortcut to sanctification. Everything we know about God comes from Scripture. Discerning Christians should always on the alert for statements from even trusted Christians leaders that indicate they have heard or experienced God outside of His Word. God will not whisper something in our ear or heart. He may, through the Holy Spirit, impress upon us what we should do, reveal the meaning of Scripture and causes us to bear fruit but will never give us direct messages from God.

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